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ABSTRACT

This report details initial findings and issues facing researchers working at the University of Central England on an IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions) education and training project. This project explores LIS (Library and Information Science) education standards worldwide and the potential for increased international parity of qualifications. The paper describes three possible methodological approaches for the research and their respective drawbacks. The first approach is to produce a database detailing the various accreditation criteria required for recognition by the appropriate national library organizations. The second approach examines the existing procedures operating within the EU (European Union) to allow for the recognition of overseas qualifications across all curriculum areas; there is a short description of the NARIC (National Academic Recognition Information Centre for the United Kingdom) service and its role in this area. The third approach is to compile a detailed database that looks at the course duration and content of each LIS education institution. Possible ways forward are suggested, including adapting the NARIC model to include greater detail, collecting individual course data, and requiring all national library organizations to adopt a model of accreditation for LIS courses. (MES)

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An investigation of LIS qualifications throughout the World

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Abstract

Abstract: This report details some initial findings and issues facing researchers working at the University of Central England, UK on an IFLA education and training project. This project explores an area of widespread concern, namely Library and Information Science (LIS) education standards worldwide and the potential for increased international parity of qualifications. This issue is currently hindering the international mobility of LIS professionals.

This paper describes three possible methodological approaches for the research and their respective drawbacks. The first and initially favoured possible approach is to produce a database detailing the various accreditation criteria required for recognition by the appropriate national library organisations. However, researchers find that accreditation is often a subjective procedure and is carried out in relatively few countries worldwide. The second approach examines the existing procedures operating within the EU to allow for the recognition of overseas qualifications across all curriculum areas. There is a short description of the NARIC service and their role in this area. However, this service currently operates within the EU only. It also tends to make general comparisons without distinguishing between accredited and non-accredited qualifications. The third possible research approach is to compile a detailed database which looks at the course duration and course content of each LIS

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education institution throughout the world. However the difficulties of obtaining comparable data and setting up and maintaining such a database are mentioned.

Possible ways forward are suggested including adapting the NARIC model to include greater detail, collecting individual course data, requiring all national library organisations to adopt a model of accreditation for their counties' LIS courses. Issues of international recognition of qualifications are extremely complex and require commitment and support from the international community. With this in mind, the research team is currently collecting information about LIS courses from around the world with a view to making recommendations on how data should be maintained nationally and accessed internationally. . It is hoped that this information would provide the IFLA Standing Committee with options of how this project can be taken forward.

Paper

Introduction

This paper provides an overview of the work to date on research conducted to investigate Library and Information Science (LIS) qualifications and to provide information for use in determining the equivalency of LIS qualifications worldwide. It details the initial findings - based on limited data available,- the preliminary work and also describes how this has impacted on the methodology chosen and the outcomes of the project.

The research was funded by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) and conducted by the Centre for Information Research based in the School of Information Studies at the University of Central England in Birmingham in the United Kingdom. The research began in 1999 and is ongoing.

The research emerged as a result of the recognition that there are no worldwide approved standards for LIS education and that there are no formalised methods for determining the equivalency of LIS qualifications between different countries. Indeed a cursory look at the education systems of different countries in general terms, shows there to be many differences which are likely to be reflected in the field of LIS education.

It was anticipated that the research would underpin two priority areas within the IFLA Section on Training and Education (SET) : standards for LIS education and reciprocity of qualifications. The research received full support from the Co-ordinating Board of the Division of Education and Research as it was considered to be a significant project with relevance to all sections within the Co-ordinating Board. In addition, a number of library associations and professional bodies had expressed concern over the lack of clarity and coherence in this area. In parallel, the Section on Education and Training has been working on Guidelines for Library/Information Education Programmes. A draft paper[1] was presented by Dr Evelyn Daniel and Dr Susan Lazinger at the IFLA SET workshop in Bangkok in 1999.

The research aims to inform current planning and development of LIS education and human resource development on a global stage. The lack of internationally agreed standards can have a negative effect on international workforce mobility.

LIS professionals often find it very difficult to obtain information about moving from country to country in professional level LIS posts. Library associations, professional bodies and organisations such as IFLA currently lack the information to enable them to appreciate the complexities of equivalencies of qualifications. In addition prospective employers require a method of assessing the suitability of overseas candidates' LIS qualifications, particularly methods which are consistent and authoritative.

It was initially intended that this exploratory research would produce a web-mounted database of recognised qualifications world wide and the responsible sanctioning or accrediting body or bodies in each country. It was anticipated that the database would include information on the core body of knowledge and the accrediting process for professional level qualifications in each country and that this information could be later used to feed into work on standards and equivalency of qualifications throughout the world. Preliminary research discovered that this approach was impractical as it was based on an assumption that did not hold true for most countries of the world and therefore did not constitute an approach that could be universally applicable. Including this original approach, two other possible approaches were considered. This paper will outline the three approaches to discover a way of determining reciprocity of LIS qualifications world wide and will describe the issues surrounding each approach. The three possible approaches considered can be broadly termed:

- professional association accreditation approach
- generic academic qualification equivalency approach
- institutional course approach

Professional association accreditation approach

The research team's initial approach was based on the situation in the UK and involved collecting information from national professional bodies of each country, such as library associations or institutes. The information collected was to have focused on the criteria used by each professional body for accreditation for professional status of LIS courses within their country.

For example, in the UK, an individual may study librarianship at undergraduate level (bachelor's level 3 years full time or 4 years sandwich course) or at post graduate level (masters level 1 year full time or 2/3 years part time). Upon completion of the course an individual will receive the award of BA/BSc or MA/MSc accredited by the higher education institution at which the course was taken. Unless these courses are accredited using criteria agreed by the Library Association and the Institute of Information Scientists (IIS), graduates of the courses will not be recognised as professionally qualified library and information practitioners. At the validation stage, each course must meet certain additional standards set down and assessed by the professional body concerned to provide graduates of the course with a recognised professional qualification. Meeting these extra criteria is the added value of the course and what makes it recognised as a professional qualification. These additional standards are intended to ensure that an accredited LIS practitioner in the UK will have obtained an education and training worthy of professional status. Therefore, in the UK it would be theoretically possible to obtain a bachelor's or master's qualification in librarianship that does not confer professional status on the recipient. In such a case, the course studied would not have met the additional accreditation criteria therefore would not be professionally accredited in the UK. In practice however, such courses no longer exist since market forces have determined that potential LIS workers in the UK demand qualifications that confer professional status.

Australia and the USA have similar accreditation systems to the UK. The UK Library Association and the American Library Association (ALA) recognise qualifications accredited by each others' national professional bodies and also by the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA). Indeed, the ALA recognises professional qualifications accredited by all nations' professional library bodies. Recent policy changes at the ALA state:

> The master's degree from a program accredited by the American Library Association [or from a master's level program in library and information studies accredited or recognized by the appropriate national body of another country] is the appropriate professional degree for librarians[2].

This approach does not consider standards or criteria used within each country to recognise or accredit courses. It relies simply on recognition of the professional bodies' decisions regarding LIS courses regardless of how these decisions have been made.

By this agreement, any LIS professional who has completed an accredited course in one of these countries is automatically deemed accredited in all of them. This allows American and Australian and UK LIS professionals some degree of free movement beyond their countries, providing all other legal requirements are made, such as residency or work permit arrangements.

The web-mounted database envisaged as a product of this research was seen as encompassing this model, allowing professional bodies internationally to see other countries' accreditation criteria and to establish reciprocal recognition of LIS qualifications.

Using the UK model, the research approach attempted to discover the criteria for professional accreditation of courses by professional bodies in each country. It was anticipated that this information could then be used to compare professional qualifications across countries and to provide benchmarks for future comparisons to be made.

As previously mentioned, there are many differences in the education systems and in the structure and organisation of professional LIS bodies across the various countries of the world. A search on the world wide web and analysis of the IFLA World Directory of Library, Archive and Information Science Associations[3] demonstrated that this was the case. In the UK, for example, there have traditionally been two professional organisations broadly representing staff across all sectors of the LIS profession - the Library Association and the Institute of Information Scientists (both of which until recent years independently professionally accredited LIS courses in the UK). This situation is due to change as moves towards merging the two organisations takes place.

The existence of more than one professional organisation was not considered to be unduly problematic, as it would have been methodologically possible and valid to collect the accreditation criteria from all professional bodies in each country and to use these for comparative purposes.

Ultimately, two major barriers were discovered to this approach. Most importantly it was discovered that professional accreditation of LIS courses by professional bodies was extremely rare, occurring in only a small proportion of countries, so the UK model outlined above was not applicable elsewhere. It would appear that in many other countries LIS qualifications were academically

accredited, but did not have to meet additional criteria in order to be professionally accredited. Secondly, even in the countries that do have professional body accreditation of courses, the exact criteria on which accreditation is based could not be identified and extracted. For example the American Library Association states

> that there was no single way to identify school or program excellence; there are many different kinds of schools achieving excellent results in different ways..[4]

The difficulty in defining exactly what makes good practice in LIS education can be concluded from the ALA's flexible enforcement of its own Standards;

> Accreditation is based upon an evaluation of a program's totality; thus, failure to meet any particular component of a standard may not result in failure to meet that standard. Similarly, failure to meet a single standard may not result in failure to achieve accredited status for a program[5]

Thus there would appear to be a great deal of flexibility and interpretation involved in deciding on professional accreditation of particular courses, such information would arguably not be explicit or exact enough to be included in a database. These problems meant that the construction of a database would be neither easy nor sensible at the current time.

Generic academic qualification equivalency approach

Research was undertaken to discover how academic institutions and national governments deal with issues of equivalency of qualifications in general terms. The home institution (UCE) and government (UK) of the research team, was taken as a starting point and information collected concerning what mechanisms or tools were at its disposal to judge the equivalency of overseas students' qualifications.

In the UK, any employer wanting to check the qualifications of an overseas applicant for a job is likely to telephone the Library Association. Any EU employer would be referred by their national professional body to the National Academic Recognition Information Centre for the United Kingdom (NARIC)[6] database of International Comparisons. NARIC was set up by the Department for Education and Employment in order to provide information and advice on the comparability of international qualifications. It has a unique interface for each country, so, for example, there is a UKNARIC and a NARIC database for each country in the European Union. The database allows users to discover the equivalency of qualifications in terms of its own countries qualifications. For example, if a librarian from Peru applied for a job in the UK, with a Maestro/Magister level qualification the employer could find out using UKNARIC that this was equivilent to a 'British Master's Degree Standard'. The database is extensively researched, taking into account details such as the difference in level of qualification awarded by different institutions. In some countries the degree awarded from one university may not be considered to be at the same level as one from another university. Although the database is only available to EU countries, the coverage it provides about qualifications is world wide.

Such a tool would appear to provide valuable information about the equivalency of qualifications in a generic sense but it is not subject specific. The question this raises is, is there a need for an LIS specific database or would the information

contained on this database or something similar suffice? One possible drawback of making comparisons at this generic level is that it is currently only fully available in a small number of (EU) countries. The potential employee from Peru in the example above would not have access to this type of information from the perspective of his or her own country. A second drawback of using NARIC is that it only allows for judgements to be made about the reciprocity of qualifications at a generic academic level. It does not take into account the additional standards of professionally accredited courses in the few countries where professional bodies accredit courses. NARIC may be useful as a model for comparing academic reciprocity of qualifications between countries that do not have additional professional accreditation. However, this would create a system which ignored professional standards and accreditation and which would be unsuitable for those countries where professional accreditation takes place.

Institutional course approach

A third approach considered by the research team for establishing criteria by which worldwide comparisons of LIS qualifications can be made was to obtain details about each individual institution offering LIS education and about the courses that each provides. The information gathered using this approach would include course title, module titles, descriptions of modules, outcomes i.e. what students are expected to have achieved as a result of studying the course and specific modules and details of any other criteria which a course must meet e.g. criteria for professional accreditation. Such information could be entered in list form onto a database and accessed by country, institution and course details. This could then be used as a basis by which to judge the level or extent of an individual's LIS education and training.

This approach, although LIS specific, has a number of drawbacks. Firstly it is unknown until further research is undertaken whether such information would be readily available in all institutions concerned in all countries or whether it would be available in a form that provided a degree of compatibility necessary for comparison. This approach would necessarily provide a list of the factors mentioned above, but would still ultimately rely on an interpretation and value judgement being made by the user of the database. Such value judgements would be made difficult, as it would be hard to determine the exact content and level of the courses undertaken and of the LIS context of each country involved. Classification skills for example, may be nominally the same, but entail a difference in the skills and competencies taught. In addition, the process of compiling such a database would be extremely labour intensive not only to set the database up, but also to ensure it is updated as each course is changed. It would also be necessary to keep information about a course over time as what might have been taught one year might not be taught in the next year despite their being no difference in the title of the course.

What is the way forward?

As mentioned, the research to date has uncovered some possible approaches to establishing the reciprocity of LIS qualifications between different countries throughout the world. However, there appears to be no clear and easy way of determining the reciprocity of qualifications as none of these approaches are without drawbacks and difficulties. What then are the possibly ways of using these approaches and providing a solution to the issues identified?

One possibility is to work with an organisation like NARIC to expand the database (or create a new one) and make it available world wide. However, this

does not clarify the issue of whether there is a need for an LIS specific database or solve the problem of whether countries that provide extra standards of LIS education by professionally accrediting academic courses would be comfortable judging equivalencies on an academic only basis. There may be scope however, for adapting such a database to include more information about professionally accredited courses and possibly include some reflection of this by providing extra weighting for these courses.

Another possibility is to obtain and compare individual course information although the practicality of this cumbersome approach is questionable. A further possibility would involve professional associations in each country taking more responsibility for putting in place mechanisms for determining qualification equivalency. This would entail all countries adopting a model of providing additional professional accreditation above and beyond academic accreditation provided by an institution. Achieving this would involve a lot of work and focussing of effort, but would contribute to ensuring that the issue of professionalism of librarianship is one that is addressed throughout the world and that some standards are put in place. Information about each country's professional accreditation criteria could then be collected and used to compare equivalencies using the original approach suggested by the research team. The Section on Education and Training has a role to play in identifying ways in which these issues might be addressed.

The issues of equivalencies of qualifications throughout the world are difficult, although it may not be a situation that is unique to the LIS profession. Indeed, anecdotal evidence suggests that individuals in other professions have experienced difficulty in moving internationally and gaining recognition for their qualifications in other countries. Even if an approach is taken which allows a database to be constructed it is questionable whether prejudice and bias may play a part in stifling the movement of LIS professionals internationally. It is clear that some standards and systematic way of judging equivalencies would be welcomed although there appears to be a necessary trade off between the practicality of constructing such a database and the need for, and confidence and authority, in its use.

The research team is continuing their investigations in this area and are currently engaged in collecting further information from professional organisations concerning each country's individual system of LIS education and professional recognition and status of LIS qualifications. It is clear that in order to find a satisfactory way of determining reciprocity of qualifications world wide more must be known about the LIS education systems throughout the world and issues addressed on a global stage. This will require the commitment and involvement of professional bodies and LIS organisations throughout the world who will need to believe that it is a worthwhile cause.

The research team expects to make recommendations on the way in which data is collected at national levels about LIS courses and qualifications to enable greater consistency between countries. It also expects to make recommendations about how LIS professional status can be measured and compared across countries. For example, it may recommend that all national professional bodies have a remit to collect and update information on courses on which they deem to confer professional LIS status on a recipient and to collect data on minimum standards of LIS qualifications. It may be possible that professional organisations in each country would have a role in the collection of such data and that a number of regional contacts representing particular areas of the world, for example, Australasia, Asia and Europe might be identified with an overall responsibility for coordinating the collection of this information in each region.

It is hoped that this information would provide the IFLA Standing Committee with options of how this project can be taken forward.

Notes

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